

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

Edited by
THE NORTHERN ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE
Sigtuna, Sweden

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No. 24

February 25th, 1957.

ANSWER TO PROFESSOR HROMADKA.

February 13th, 1957.

Dear Professor Hromadka,

In a special issue, December 1956, of the press service "Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia" you have expressed your views on the Hungarian crisis in a way that seems most remarkable to us.

In the years passed, when political tension gradually relaxed, our church saw a new opportunity to restore former connections and create new ones with the churches of Eastern Europe. A chance to meet again seemed to develop slowly.

Just because church connections across political borders are of such value to us, we feel obliged to express our immense sadness about your report.

We are conscious of the fact that a final judgment on the Hungarian catastrophe cannot be made yet and that you as well as we are dependent on the sources of information, available for us.

We believe, however, that we have a right to comment on your account of the events as follows:

We received our information not only from the press, which in our country comprises the communistic as well as the bourgeois press, but also from representatives of relief organizations who have been eye-witnesses to the events in Hungary, from refugees of all categories and various other persons. From all that we learned it seems obvious to us that what happened on October 23rd last year was a national revolt, initially incited by people, who had been chosen and educated by the communist government like students and officers as well as workers, and who remained being the driving force throughout the whole period of unrest. Even if reactionary elements took part in this strife and even if acts of revenge were committed - which one cannot be too surprised at after such a long and desperate time of suffering - it does not hide the fact that the nation in its overwhelming majority wanted this revolution and still wants it.

We deplore deeply that you do not seem to see how unanimous and desperate this revolt against a communistic regime and the interference with political development of the country is. There remains the question: Do you not want to see perhaps? With regret we see that your attitude in this matter is so different from that of the British Church leaders who did not fail to warn their government regarding the Suez crisis.

Considering more closely the reason for your incomprehensible attitude towards the events in Hungary, we must state that the explanation for your attitude is already to be found in your views on the European situation, which you dealt with in the introduction to your report in such a broad and extensive manner. We do not see how we shall explain our reaction to your words without commenting on your view points, although we are conscious of the difficulty to discuss such a delicate question in a letter.

In your attitude to the situation in Hungary you emphasize quite correctly the fact that these tragic events can only be understood and judged in the context of the entire political development in Europe since World War II. In your analysis you put much stress on the important roll the cold war represents. In this point we agree with you completely. Wholeheartedly we must also agree to your opinion that people in Church service and above all those working for the ecumenical movement have the responsibility clearly to oppose onesided and misleading propaganda. We do not want to justify ourselves in this matter. The churches in the West have certainly not always raised their voices freely and courageously, when false and provoking propaganda has operated with poisoned arrows.

It would not be honest, would we not openly express how difficult it is for us to listen to your exhortations just in regard to this question.

We feel worried and disturbed by your judgment of the situation in Hungary. Your views agree in all important points so completely with the Soviet Russian propaganda, which we have had a chance to see daily in our own communist press during the months passed. In a surprisingly onesided way you defend throughout the attitude of the Soviet Union in this conflict and likewise you consider the West guilty of having exercised an influence on this tragic development in Hungary, which is said to have led to decisive turning points. Considering our feelings in regard to your attitude we hope you will not be offended if we state that it is not easy for us to be encouraged by you to criticise Western propaganda in order to stop the disastrous effects of a cold war at this moment. At any rate you should understand that the authority of your voice would have quite a different effect on us, if we had been able to find in your report at least one example where you had chosen an attitude void of prejudice, but one objective and open enough to realize the responsibility and the guilt on both sides - an attitude which you expect us to have. Instead we had to come to the very painful conclusion that your judgment of the events is consistently onesided and onesided to an extent, which gives us the impression that there is no possibility for you or anyone of your ^{opinion} to criticise your own government if only slightly, whereas all criticism is turned against our governments. Do you really believe that you in this way show authority to incite us to criticise our governments and their propaganda without fear?

We want to comment on this more in details:

1. We do not overlook that certain, although extremely careful and moderate, critical observations on certain phenomena of the communist states of the East were made in your letter. But all hope is taken away from us again when you in a way of apologizing point out the handicapping effects of "foreign propaganda" of "remains of old nationalism, even chauvinism, hopes for restoration, which were cunningly nourished from abroad". This statement can only be taken as a justification for faults committed. Unequivocally you consider the catastrophic development of the Hungarian revolutionary movement as being the result of foreign infiltration. (In your use of words it is striking that the word "foreign" always means "Western". Soviet Russian influence in Hungary, which stretches so far that children have to learn Russian in school and the population has to celebrate Russian holidays, does not seem "foreign" to you). Be it as it may with complete information on the violent events, as we have already mentioned in the beginning of this letter, we have never denied that also reactionary elements can have made an attempt to exploit the situation. If there really are so many of them still, it would be extremely strange, if they had not been active at such an occasion. We have also with regret and disapproval listened to certain political comments which cardinal Mindszenty made in his radio address. For we believe that it was the definite will of a great number of the rebels not to give up the socialistic order again, a fact of which Anna Ketly and other representatives of the workers have convinced us. But it seems very strange to us that you do not mention the universal Hungarian dissatisfaction with the interference of Russia with all matters of political and economic life, which has been going on for years, and with the terror of the secret police. By trustworthy refugees and people in Church service, who had had an opportunity to observe and judge the situation in person and who were by no means "fascists", this dissatisfaction was unequivocally indicated as being an important cause for the violent development of the events after it had become clear to the people in Hungary that the Russian troops would not be withdrawn. We cannot withhold the question whether this surprising silence of yours was just accidental or whether the only purpose of your long report was supposed to be the wish to deliver a speech of defense - but what for and for whom?
2. In your account of the development of relations between East and West since World War II, which in several respects is excellent, you feel obliged to state that "prejudices, suspicions and schematic ideas about life beyond the so-called iron curtain do not only not disappear, but become more intensive". And you ask: "Why does radio propaganda ten and more times a day attack public opinion in the countries with a people's democracy in a manner that is rather more intensive than moderate, in order to deepen the resistance against a new social-political system, in order to spread an atmosphere of suspicion and to arouse hopes for possible 'help from the West'? Who is interested in this? Only the emigrants, who have left their countries or fled from there, who hope for former conditions to return?"

In respect to this we must raise a counter-question: "When does 'foreign propaganda' represent a real danger in a sound social

democracy?" Never. Only if social conditions are not sound and at the same time any criticism of the responsible political leadership is prohibited - which after all is the only remedy in a situation like this - "foreign propaganda" can be dangerous. We are in a position to recall - from the time of German occupation of our country - how it is to live in a country, where the entire press and every news service is controlled by the oppressors and where public opinion is levelled according to their wishes. In a case like this people must hunger for "foreign propaganda". And where such a hunger exists, there will also always be someone, who is ready to satisfy it and this might not always be the most trustworthy person or group. Do not think that we - without making any distinctions - approve of all radio stations in the West that promise liberty. But if it is true, as you and others from countries behind the iron curtain have tried to make us believe in recent years, that the social revolution in those countries has already achieved a real progress and a genuine social reform, then we do not understand that a people forming their own free opinions can be anything to be feared. Then we do not understand that a condition precedent for an unhealthy influence of "foreign propaganda" is created by yourself by levelling all opinions. In our countries communistic propaganda has a free field of action. It can criticise our "system" as much as it wants and as long as it wants and it is done every day. They can try as much as they wish to make us long for the better conditions of their system and to become wholeheartedly dissatisfied with our old system. And we wish that they may keep this freedom. In case their system should truly be the better one, it would be disastrous to deprive them of their opportunity to convince us of it. If they cannot convince us, although they have the liberty to try, can their system be better for us then? Why is the "socialistic state" not strong and sound enough to tolerate a similar freedom? We can and should not suppress this question just in these days.

3. We have come to the important point, where necessarily a discussion of the methods must follow, which have been practised in the "people's democracies". We see with gratitude that even you admit that certain methods have been used which "lose their function in times of normal development". In this connection you mention the dictatorship of the proletariat. That the latter is only a provisional means to create a new social structure, is an old classical doctrine of marxism. But we know also from history that each dictatorship has a tendency to prolong itself for an indefinite time and that it does not surrender so easily. Therefore the password of dictatorial methods being a provisional necessity can be exploited to defend any possible form of despotism. Where a justification of such a password is admitted at all, the possibility to protest against violence and injustice has already been disposed of voluntarily. If a dictatorship has had any justification for its existence at all, it can only be proved by its disappearance at an earliest possible date and by giving the whole population a chance freely to elect their representatives, who can seize responsibility for the political structure of the nation. The call for free elections in Hungary has been sharply rejected by the Soviet Union as also the suggestion of the United Nations to have a neutral commission investigate the entire conflict.

You did not let us know your opinion on the attitude of the Soviet Union in these questions. Your silence on this point makes it difficult for us to judge the importance of your remarks on the provisional character of the dictatorship.

We for our part cannot believe in the permanent soundness of a socialism, which cannot bear the political freedom of the people. We agree with you completely in believing that there is no "return" to the unbearable conditions of the former feudal states, that also in the people's democracies there can only be a "forward". It had been a great satisfaction for us, if you had found a way of telling us openly that there cannot be a "forward", where people are being deprived of their political freedom by a permanent dictatorship.

We understand very well that a church can live in a dictatorial state for a long time; - sometimes it must suffer greatly under the fact that no dictatorship can grant a church the amount of freedom necessary for the performance of its services. But we do not understand that it can be the task of a man in Church service at any time to justify provisional dictatorship, especially in times, when millions of people suffer under the effects of this dictatorial system. The depressing refugee problem of our time does result from the fact that so many nations, which because of their dictatorial form of government do not grant civil rights to those political opposers of the group in power, which in dictatorial states normally only builds a small minority of the total population. "Western democracies", which you accuse of being guilty of causing the tragic events of our time, have refrained from using dictatorial methods. They must on account of that receive and take care of the endless stream of refugees from dictatorial states. Our churches have worked hard to perform this necessary, humanitarian task in the World Council of Churches. You appeal to our compassion for the people, who became victims of certain revengeful actions in the days of the Hungarian revolution. We are willing to listen to your appeals, even if undoubtedly there were also persons among them, who had provoked the hatred of their fellow citizens by working as informers and rendering other recompensed service to the police. But it is difficult for us to grasp that you have no words for the sufferings of the innumerable refugees, who have fled from their homes and their country because of fear of the too well-known methods of the dictatorial system of their country. Being honest to yourself, you do not believe that all of them or even the majority of them are "contrarevolutionary fascists", who have no right to be pitied, or do you? The only time you mention these unhappy people in your report is the remark on the "emigrants", who in your words appear as being the mainly responsible for the supposed detrimental effects of "foreign propaganda".

In this respect we must confess that the tone, which you used in one of your passages, surprises us and makes an unpleasant impression on us. You say that the Hungarian tragedy shows the consequences of "an antisoviet hysteria, as it is constantly nursed in many parts of the world". We admit that in the Western world there has existed and does still exist a hysterical fear of communism and we have been and will always be ready to fight it, wherever it is displayed. Attacks on MacCarthyism in all its forms have not

been infrequent in the Western European democratic press. But you must understand why - especially in the months passed - a powerful wave of anger has passed over the small democratic states of Europe as a reaction to the methods used by the Soviet Union to exercise her military power in Hungary. And you must understand the feelings of citizens of small nations - who not long ago were overpowered by a foreign military force that also claimed to liberate us and spare us worse misfortunes -, when they start thinking about the fate of Hungary. Furthermore we want you to know that your attempt to justify the military intervention of the Soviet Union in Hungary with the hypothesis that worse things had happened, had the Soviet Union not intervened, does not make any impression on us. Whenever military intervention of a big and powerful state against a small state has to be justified, such hypotheses are always ready at hand. They are a standard requisite of every somewhat skilled war propaganda. Even if you to our greatest surprise present this hypothesis, it has only one effect on us and that is: we apprehend clearly that something has to be concealed from us.

As long as such things happen in the "communist nations", as long as we receive trustworthy information on deportations - which usually are denied first and confessed later -, on methods of trial, which remind us of the Gestapo, on the complete legal insecurity of citizens, of which every refugee is a living proof, just as long there will be an antisoviet and anticommunist negation in the West. We warn you not to belittle this negation by using the term "hysteria". We, who sharply condemned these things in the Third Reich, cannot approve of them now, only because they occur in a system, which adorns itself with the beautiful phrase "socialistic". We can only judge each system according to its actions, not its name. Again we take the liberty of putting a rather plain question? Did you really seriously expect us to take a different attitude?

4. And now we come to the last point in your report, which we want to criticise. Mentioning the rehabilitation of certain Hungarian bishops you allow yourself to write the following sentences: "All of us must examine ourselves critically. But we are not going to join in the demonstrations of rejoicing at the great day on which former dignitaries reoccupied their bishop palaces, while thousands of people were murdered and the flag of social and political nationalism was hoisted at the same time." In this sentence two things are characteristic. Firstly: the rehabilitation of certain bishops and the murder of thousands of people in an attempt to reintroduce nationalsocialism are linked together in a way, which does not assert directly that these bishops or the powers of the church behind them were responsible for or approved of the horrible events during the contrarevolution, but just the indirect hint at a connection between those two points makes the effect even more powerful. Secondly: No names are mentioned. In regard to the first point we must say: in case an accusation of this kind is actually raised against Hungarian protestant bishops and responsible circles of their churches, this is such a fatally serious problem that the accusation should be formulated in a precise and unmistakable way and not only insinuated vaguely. Regarding the second point we must say: The accusation is from a human and christian standpoint so defaming that information on the names can be demanded or else the

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whole matter should be kept secret. You mention no names, and only you yourself will know why. We shall mention one: Lajos Ordass. He was one of those Hungarian bishops, who were rehabilitated as a result of the negotiations at the meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Budapest last summer. Since you have mentioned the facts quoted above without giving any names, also on the highly respected name of this man your words cast a shadow of suspicion. We must protest against this. We hope that you had no intention to do so and we expect that you will find an opportunity soon to confirm it publicly. Until that happens we are going to keep our attitude of protest. If a man has ever been condemned and punished unjustly, then Lajos Ordass has. If there has ever been a bishop, who has never sympathized with a nationalsocialistic contrarevolution, it has been Lajos Ordass.

We want you to know that nothing in your long report has hurt us so tremendously as the unjustified suspicion, which has fallen on Lajos Ordass and his church by your careless words. It is impossible for us to believe - as long as you do not force us to - that you should have felt less happiness than we about the rehabilitation of this man, who had been condemned unjustly and abandoned by certain people of his own church.

In addition we must make the following comment: You agree that in the former leadership of the Church not everything was as it should have been. We have co-operated with them and given them moral support in acknowledging them. Consequently we have to ask ourselves a few questions. Some of your words may probably be interpreted so that you feel the sting of this question. Would it not at this moment be more appropriate to speak quite distinctively of this shadow, which is cast upon us instead of letting a shadow be cast on those rehabilitated leaders of the Church, who have already suffered under so much injustice done to them?

We have been obliged to speak without restraint. We still hope that also in future we will have a chance to co-operate with you in the ecumenical movement. But we cannot conceal from you that it has become much more difficult for us then it ever was after having read the publication of your report on Hungary. We have great hopes that you may understand. Therefore we write to you in form of a personal letter, although the contents have been discussed with and approved of by all members of the Committee for Inter-Church relations of our Church.

We write in our capacity as men of the Church, who have always respected you highly. Just therefore we cannot keep silent. We had to tell you which impression your thoughts on Hungary have made on us.

With brotherly regards,
Yours,

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